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ABSTRACT

Within the last 4 years, four one-room school houses have been restored for use as educational museum facilities. These include the Pleasant Valley School in Stillwater, Oklahoma; the Rose Hill School at Perry, Oklahoma; the old school located on the grounds of the Harn Homestead Museum in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; and the Old Roll School, located in the City Park in Cheyenne, Oklahoma. In almost all cases, the one-room school facilities were restored because an interested group of citizens became concerned with the possible loss or destruction of the aging schools. Financing for restoration varied among sites. Two sites were financed through private donations of money, materials, and time. The Rose Hill School project was supported through state and federal supplements. The restored schools are used for educational, community, civic, and other service groups. The Pleasant Valley School and the Old Roll School are owned by the cities in which they are located, and are governed by local councils or committees. The Rose Hill School is owned and operated by the Oklahoma Historical Society. The Pleasant Valley School is used by fourth grade classes from within an approximate 50-mile radius of Stillwater to participate in an all-day living history curriculum. The School has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places and has received numerous awards. These schools not only provide unforgettable history lessons, they also provide their communities with a source of pride and tourism. (KS)

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RESTORATION OF ONE-ROOM SCHOOL FACILITIES IN OKLAHOMA

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For Presentation at the
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Restoration of One-Room School Facilities In Oklahoma

Introduction

The rural, one-room school house has received a new "lease on life" in Oklahoma. Within the last four years, no less than four of these educational facilities which dotted the rural landscape at the turn of the century have been restored for use as living history, educational museum facilities. The purpose of this paper is to chronicle that movement for the interested reader and to document reasons for this phenomenon and its implications for rural education, both in Oklahoma and in the United States.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows:

1. Initial idea/impetus for restoration;
2. financing (how much - sources);
3. Structural construction problems;
4. Current use of facility (regulations);
5. Ownership/governance;
6. Educational programming/uses;
7. Financing the current operation and management/maintenance;
8. Special recognitions/awards received; and
9. Implications/significance for rural education.

As mentioned above, four schools have been restored for educational museum use in Oklahoma in the past four years. These include the Pleasant Valley School in Stillwater, Oklahoma; the Rose Hill School, a project of the Oklahoma Historical Society located within

the Cherokee Strip Museum grounds at Perry, Oklahoma; the old school restored and located on the grounds of the Harn Homestead Museum in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; and the Old Roll School, located in the City Park in Cheyenne, Oklahoma. At the time of this writing, no information was available on the Harn restoration. Thus, reference will be made in the following sections of this paper only to the other three schools, although this writer is most familiar with the restoration and operation of the restored, one-room school facility in Stillwater, Oklahoma, herein after known as Pleasant Valley School.

Initial Idea/Impetus for Restoration

In almost all cases, the Oklahoma one-room school facilities discussed here were restored because an interested group of citizens became concerned with the possible loss or destruction of the aging school within their midst.

In the case of the Pleasant Valley School, an historical task force from Oklahoma City, wishing to relocate a one-room school to the Harn Museum site, approached the City of Stillwater with the proposition of moving the old Pleasant Valley School. At that time, an interested group of citizens living around and near the dilapidated school took up the challenge to restore the school and preserve it at its original location. In other cases, restoration of old buildings and schools has often been motivated by financial incentives and/or tax credits available to owners of said properties.

Financing for Restoration

The Pleasant Valley School cost approximately $53,000 in actual cash outlay to restore from its dilapidated state to one that is today used by area elementary classes, civic and community groups, and other citizens as a living history museum and community meeting place. In-kind donations of labor and materials amounted to an additional $20,000. The Pleasant Valley restoration project includes a completely modern heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system, new windows, newly milled wooden flooring, and a fully enclosed, functional "outdoor plumbing" facility. Not one cent of tax-supported money, federal or state, was used in the restoration of the Pleasant Valley School.

On the other hand, the Rose Hill School in Perry (Cherokee Strip Museum) was a project of and by the State of Oklahoma through its Historical Society as a museum edifice and thus, was supported at all major junctures with the use of state and federal supplements. The Roll School in Cheyenne was moved from its location nearly 20 miles from Roll to Cheyenne. This move and attendant restoration required donations in excess of $5,000 from former students and private citizens in the area. Numerous citizens donated time, materials, and all internal furnishings, as was the case at the Pleasant Valley School.

Structural/Construction Problems Which had to be Addressed

The Pleasant Valley School sits on a stone foundation. The mortar and stone around the foundation was badly deteriorating and

had to be re-mortared, almost from scratch. Also cross-bracing in the rafters was needed and the floor was completely replaced.

Current Use of the Building/Regulations

The Pleasant Valley School is used for educational, community, civic, and other service groups in the community only. The major use, currently, is by elementary school classes (fourth grade) as a part of the Oklahoma elementary social studies curriculum. Further elaboration on this use is addressed below. It is clearly the philosophy and policy of the Pleasant Valley Board of Directors that the school will not be used by private groups or for commercial purposes.

The Rose Hill School in Perry is fully booked and open daily (except holidays) as a part of the Cherokee Strip Museum complex inasmuch as it is a project of the Oklahoma Historical Society. It serves as a living history museum within the greater Cherokee Strip Museum grounds.

The Roll School, as a living history museum, is open from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m., five days a week, Tuesday through Sunday. Fairly permissive community use is allowed.

Ownership/Governance

The Pleasant Valley School is owned by the City of Stillwater and operated by a voluntary board of directors serving as an appointed council to operate, maintain, and govern the use of the building. The Pleasant Valley School Foundation has a 99 year lease with the City at the rate of $1 per year.

The Rose Hill School in Perry is owned and operated, as mentioned earlier, by the Oklahoma Historical Society (OHS) and as such, falls under the rules and regulations of the OHS field museum program. The Roll School in Cheyenne is located on city property, having been moved there from the Roll community, some 20 miles north of Cheyenne in Roger Mills County, Oklahoma. It is governed by the County Historical and Preservation Committee.

Educational Programming/Uses of One-Room School facilities

The Pleasant Valley School is used by fourth grade classes from within an approximate 50 mile radius of Stillwater. About 40 classes come to the school (per year) with their teacher to participate in an all-day living history curriculum taught by volunteer docents from the Stillwater community. The building is also available for civic and other community groups on a first-come, first-serve basis. Reservations may be made through the Deputy Superintendent's Office at the Stillwater Board of Education. No commercial or private use of the facility is allowed.

The Rose Hill School at Perry is staffed by a full-time, certificated teacher, who, with the cooperation of surrounding school districts, also prepares and presents a full-day "living history" program for participating fourth grade classes. It is almost fully-booked annually with attending elementary classes from throughout Northern Oklahoma.

The Roll School in Cheyenne also presents a 1910 curriculum. It has only been open since May of 1991. No utilities prevent any use in the evenings.

Current Financing of the On-going Operation and Maintenance of the One-Room School Facility

The Pleasant Valley School has relied wholly on private donations and contributions from user groups. School districts are charged $1 per visiting student (on a voluntary basis). Donations are suggested, but not mandatory, from other civic and community groups which use the building. This revenue is insufficient to cover the entire cost of maintenance, upkeep, and support of the voluntary program offered at the School. Therefore, an annual fund drive has been developed in an attempt to endow the operation of the school at the rate of approximately $8,000 per year which will provide for stipends for the volunteer docents, an annual maintenance program, payment of insurance, and other miscellaneous costs necessary for the operation of the facility. Again, it must be emphasized that no tax-supported revenues have been used for the Pleasant Valley School.

The Rose Hill School in Perry is funded and operated by the Oklahoma Historical Society, although donations are accepted. The salary of the teacher and the curriculum is underwritten by the State of Oklahoma.

The Roll School in Cheyenne is operated much like the Pleasant Valley School, in that a donation box is available during museum

hours and a $1 fee is charged for student groups using the facility. The City of Cheyenne provides volunteer maintenance.

Special Recognition or Awards Received By or in the Name of the School

The Pleasant Valley School, under the leadership of a retired history faculty member at Oklahoma State University, applied for and received placement on the National Register of Historic Places authorized by the U.S. Department of the Interior. In addition, the School has received numerous citations and recognition awards for the restoration accomplishment. The most outstanding and noteworthy of these are the two top state awards presented annually by the Oklahoma Historical Society: The Historic Interiors Preservation Award and the Preservation Officers' Citation of Merit Award.

Although the Roll School has been in operation only since May of 1991, its restoring task force believes that their reward "comes in knowing that we are instilling our area heritage in our young people."

Implications and Significance of the Restoration of Restored Schools for Rural Education

All three schools described in this report have utilized a restored, turn-of-the-century, frontier days, living history curriculum for use in their programs. Many teachers and students who have experienced the "1910" curriculum proclaim that it is the best history lesson they've ever had. They do not forget it "from their McGuffy reading lesson which teaches a moral to the ciphering

matches which force them to compute in their heads, to the basic good penmanship, to the games of 'drop-the-hanky', 'annie-annie-over', 'kick-the-wicket', and spelling bees. It is the heart of 'motivating to learn'." The Pleasant Valley School facility will also serve, in the very near future, as a clinical field experience for Oklahoma State University teacher education majors and a community service project for sororities at OSU.

Finally, and not least, these restored, one-room schools present their respective communities with a source of pride in having preserved and converted rather dilapidated, unsightly, old structures into facilities of which the respective community can be proud. In many ways they serve not only as a link to the past, but a tourism and economic development strategy for the area in which the restored facility resides.